

ON CONCEPT OF *TURK* IN 18th CENTURY ALBANIAN LITERATURE

Abstract

In the Albanian literature of the 18th century, the terms *Turk* (Albanian turk) and *Turkishness* (Albanian turqëri) had a specific usage linked directly with the relations established by Albanians with the Ottoman Empire and Islam as the religious backbone of this political state formation.

In his Albanian Divan, written in the first decade of the 18th century, Nezim Berati sees the world as divided into *Turq* (Muslims) and Kaurrë (Christians). In this religious perception of the world, he denominates the community of Muslim believers as *Turqëri*, a word coined in the Albanian language from the name Turk with the suffix -ri commonly used in Albanian for the formation of collective nouns.

Poet Hasan Zyko Kamberi (XVIII cent.) uses also the term Turk to denominate all Muslim believers, without distinction in time and space. Turks is the term used for Muslim believers at the time of Prophet Muhammad, during the wars of the second caliph ‘Umar and also for the Muslim contemporaries of the poet.

The usage in the 18th century Albanian of the words *Turk* and *Turqëri* to denote the Muslim believers and the religious faith of the Muslims, Islam, is closely linked with the experience of Albanians with this faith and directly with the phenomenon of their first contacts with this religion and the form in which it was institutionalized, beginning from the second half of the 14th century. It is a well known historical fact that this process of institutionalization began to be implemented with the arrival of the Ottoman armies at Albanian territories and the ever more intensive contacts of Albanians with the Ottoman state and with the Ottoman Turks, in particular.

Key Words: Albanian literature, Turk, Islam, identity, Nezim Berati, Hasan Zyko Kamberi

The Albanian literature of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century is mostly a classical divan literature, dominated by the *gazels*, *kasides* and *mesnevis*. The most important center for the development of this literature is the city of Berat (Arnavut Belgradı), but besides it, it was developed also in urban cities like Elbasan (İlbasan), Gjirokastra (Ergiri), Shkodra (İşkodra), Gjakova (Yakova), Prizren (Prizrin), Shkup (Üsküp), Tetovë (Kalkandelen), Ulqin (Ülgün), etc. The city of Berat is quite different from other contemporary Albanian cities thanks to the cultural policy pursued by the Vlora (Avlonyalı) dynasty family, which has been regularly ruling the sandjak of Vlora,

centered in Berat, for almost two centuries.¹ With its urban constructions, this family created a favorable social environment for holding debates and discussions of a literary and cultural nature, but it also developed an active patronage policy.² Reciting of Albanian poems alongside the Ottoman Turkish poems during various official ceremonies was decisive for the development of this poetry. This practice gave the Albanian language a literary status that had a direct impact on its literary creativeness and the development of literature, in general.

Until the 18th century, the written Albanian was used only in books of catechism for utilitarian and didactic purposes by the Catholic Albanians of the North. The 18th century poets created the first genuine literary works in Albanian literature. The *Albanian divan* of Nezim Berati (d. 1760) is the first complete literary work created in Albanian language. In the history of Albanian literature, the literature of this phase is the forerunner of the modern literature that developed parallel with the national processes taking place in the Albanian territories (19th century).

This literature was created by the Muslim Albanians and the Albanian language was written in the Arabic alphabet. In the southern Albanian territories, it was read and circulated also by the Orthodox Albanians. In the second half of the 19th century, however, due to the cultural and political developments among the Albanians, we find it written also in the Greek and then in the Latin alphabet.

Developed in a multilingual environment, in which alongside Albanian, the mother tongue, Ottoman Turkish was also used as the official language of the state, and with Arabic and Persian being taught in schools (medrese), this literature would fully reflect this reality. This is so, not only because the poets of that time would create simultaneously in several languages (the most classical case being that of Nezim Berati, who has divans in four languages, Albanian, Turkish, Persian and Arabic), but we also note that in Albanian literary works, in the majority of cases, poems are presented by means of explanatory titles in Turkish, while in the body of their texts we find incorporated Turkish expressions, Arabic sayings taken from *hadiths* or verses from *Quran*. Furthermore, there are also some hybrid poems, like that by Nezim Berati, in which one line is in Albanian and one in Turkish.³

1 Genciana Abazi-Egro, "The dynastic Vlora family and the Albanian culture during XVIII century," 100 Years Of Independence: Speeches of the International Scientific Conference held in Tirana, 26-27 November 2012, vol. II, Tirana: QSA 2014, p. 475-485.

2 It was precisely during the years of the Vlora family rule in Berat, that great poets like Nezim Berati (d. 1760) and then Sulejman Naibi (d. 1772) and many minor poets like Fejzi (sh. XVIII), Irzi, and others appeared in the Albanian literature.

3 Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati: Divani shqip*, textual critical edition, Tiranë: Toena 2009, 167-171.

Circulation and transmission of this literature was done through manuscripts. Therefore transcription and textual criticism remain one of the first issues with which this literature is faced in the Albanian literary historiography.

Furthermore, seeing this literature as part of the Ottoman patrimony in the Balkans, studies and publications on it reflect also the ideological and political stands maintained towards the Ottoman Empire through the 20th century. Such extra-scientific attitude have had a negative influence and have hindered the publication of this literature, which during the past century was published only in a fragmentary and selective manner. The complete publication of such works began only in the beginning of the 21st century.⁴

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In the Albanian literature of the 18th century, the terms *Turk* (Albanian *turk*) and *Turkishness* (Albanian *turqëri*) had a specific usage linked directly with the relations established by Albanians with the Ottoman Empire and Islam as the religious backbone of this political state formation. What do 18th century Albanians really mean by the term *Turk* and to what extent was this word used during this period? What are the connections of such linguistic usages with the political and cultural reality of the time and more specifically, do the function and usages of such linguistic organization allow us to draw conclusions about the historical and social dimensions of the relations between the Albanians and the Turks?

In order to give answers to such questions, I have made the Albanian poetry of Nezim Berati (d. 1760) and Hasan Zyko Kamberi (died after 1822) the object of a detailed analysis. I have chosen these poets due to their prevalence and determining character in the literary discourse and literary processes of the 18th century. Furthermore, these two poets belonged respectively to the first and second half of the 18th century. Nezim Berati is an author of the first divan in Albanian language, which created the necessary linguistic foundation for the classical divan poetry. Hasan Zyko Kamberi, on the other hand, is a realist poet. Besides, from what we know so far, this poet was the first to write *ilmihal* and *mewlid* in Albanian, being thus also the first Albanian author who quite clearly and intentionally used Albanian language for conveying to the public the Islam history and culture.

Nezim Berati and the *Turk* concept

In his Albanian *Divan*, written in the first decade of the 18th century, Nezim Berati sees the world as divided into *Turq* (Muslims) and *Kaurrë*

4 Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati: ...*; Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Hasan Zyko Kamberi: Poezi*, textual critical edition, forthcoming.

(Christians). In this religious perception of the world, he denominates the community of Muslim believers as *Turqëri*, a word coined in the Albanian language from the name *Turk* with the suffix *-ri* commonly used in Albanian for the formation of collective nouns. In the meantime, he uses *Turqëri* also to denominate Islam, the religious faith of Muslims.

Gaha *turqërija* ikë,
në do që të jesh pa frikë;
as mendon kurrë një çikë,
se kë quajnë mysliman?⁵

(Does not even think who is a Muslim, hence, if you want to live without fear [of the Last Day of Judgement], leave Islam.)

... *turqërija* hyn në xhenet,
unë dynja, gaha belaja.⁶

(Muslim believers go to paradise, whereas I live in the world with my concerns.)

Poet Nezim Berati uses the term *Turk* to denominate the Muslim believers, without making any ethnical distinctions. For Muslim believers, he also uses the nouns *Mysliman* (Muslim) and *mymin* (believer). In fact, in his poems, he constructs his rhetorical question addressed to the Muslim believers to assert their devotion and religious identity by using these three names (*Mysliman, Turk, mymin*):

as mendon kurrë një çikë,
se kë quajnë mysliman⁷

(Does not even think who is a Muslim)

kush është *turk* më inandis,
se gjuha më s'mund të flasë.⁸

(Let every Muslim convince me, the language can speak no more)

kush e di vetëhenë mymin,
i lutem të bënjë hazer.⁹

(Whoever knows himself to be a believer, let him be careful)

The poet defines the Muslim person in relation to his community, which he designates with the terms *Turqëri* and *ymeti Muhamet* (Muhammed's ummah), as well as in relationship with the believers of the other religion, Christianity, which he denominates with the terms *gjaurr*, *kaurr* and *qafir*

5 Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati: ...*, p. 74.

6 Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati: ...*, p. 357.

7 Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati: ...*, p. 74.

8 Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati: ...*, p. 327.

9 Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati: ...*, p. 252.

(Christian, nonmuslim).¹⁰ In the majority of cases, the poet places the Muslims against the Christians. This classification of the world, linguistically is shown using the expression *turq e kaurr* (Muslims and Christians). In fact, the expression *turq e kaurr*, used in the Albanian language manifest a sustainable and fixed form.

The name *Mysliman*, which is more frequently used, is used in a broader context, in various juxtapositions, related to the religious characterization of personal names, or to the values and ways of living, which characterized both religious communities.

In Nezim Berati's Albanian *Divan*, we do not find usages of ethnical names, with the exception of the name *Maxhar* "Hungarian", which he uses to indicate the place of origin of a rival.¹¹ Meanwhile, he sees language itself first of all as a means of creating literature. For this reason, he decides to compose in the Albanian language, in order to give prestige to the Albanian language alongside other languages of literature, such as Persian and Turkish.¹² In this classification of literature made by the poet on the basis of the language in which it is created, there is no geographical or ethnic dimension. This is so because in this period, composing in a particular language, specifically in the Ottoman Turkish, which was the official language, was an attribute given not only of those who were of Turkish ethnicity. The best example of such a multi-linguistic situation, which characterized the pre-modern epoch of nations is poet Nezim Berati, who wrote simultaneously in four languages, namely, Albanian, Turkish, Persian and Arabic, but before him also the well-known poets of Albanian origin Mesihî Prishtina (Pristineli Mesihî, d. 1512) and Jahja bej Dukagjini (Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey/Dukaginzade Yahya, d. 1582), who composed in Ottoman Turkish works that have won world renown and have enriched world literature.

Do *shqip* qofshinë, do *turki*,
fjalëtë e Nezimit *inxhi*,

10 These three words in Albanians have penetrated from the Turkish *gâvur* and *kâfir* (their origin is from the word *kâfir* of Arabic language). The word in Turkish was influenced also by the word *gebr* from Persian in the meaning of "admirer of fire, disciple of Zarathustra." See Şemseddin Sami (Frashëri), *Kamusi turki*, İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları 1995, p. 1141.

11 Me atë vyxhut posi ari,
më s'të mban as pallamari,
pirdhu gjidi si gomari,
gjidi kaurr i Maxharit.
(With that bear like body of yours, the rope cannot hold you, fuck off like a donkey, you dirty Hungarian Giaur.) Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati: ...*, p. 250.

12 Poem *Ve lehu der tertibi Divan* (By the same author, on the writing of a divan.). Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati: ...*, p. 71-72.

këtu-këtje edhe *farsi*¹³

(*Nezim's words are pearls both in Albanian and in Turkish, and here and there also in Persian*)

Në kaside të *farsisë*

makbul bejtet e *Urfisë*,

të Nefiut në të *turkisë*

në *shqipet* zar-u-nizarit.¹⁴

(*Among the Persian kasides, stood out the verses of poet 'Urfi, while in Turkish, the verses of Nef'i, and in Albanian, the verses of the humble*)

The use of the term *Turk* in the denomination of the Turkish, which in this period is done also by means of the word *Osmanî*, however does not testify to the use of the word *Turk* in the ethnic meaning by Nezim Berati.

Hasan Zyko Kamberi and *Turk* concept

At the end of the 18th century, poet Hasan Zyko Kamberi displays a special sensitivity towards issues of faith (iman) and expounds in the Albanian language all the problems manifested in the conduct of a believer in the spiritual, mental and practical aspects. In the context of this constant concern of his, besides prayers addressed to God he had composed in Albanian also poems of a didactical religious nature (*ilmihal*), poems of an informative nature, such as the history of Islam or histories about significant events in Islam, such as the contradictions between Ali and Muawiyah, but also parts of religious rites such as *Mewlid* (songs to Prophet Muhammad's birthday and his feats). Such creations of a religious and theological nature allow us to form a complete picture of the religious lexicon and, in particular, of the Islamic religious terminology. Furthermore, they enable us also to make an accurate estimate of the semantic content of the used terms.

Hasan Zyko Kamberi uses the terms *Turk*, *mymin* (believer), and *ymeti Muhamet* (Islamic ummah).¹⁵ The poet uses the term *Turk* to denominate all Muslim believers, without distinction in time and space. *Turks* is the term

13 Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati*: ..., p. 276.

14 Genciana Abazi-Egro, *Nezim Berati*: ..., p. 100.

15 Hasan Zyko Kamberi uses the expression *ymeti Muhamet*, taken from the Ottoman Turkish (*ümmeti Muhammed*), to designate the community of Muslim believers and more rarely also the Muslim believers themselves. The use of the collective term to designate the members of the community is a semantic development, not much used in Albanian, which in general, in the field of appellations, follows the opposite movement, the name of the member designates the community where he belongs. Such a use is not found in Nezim Berati, who uses the expression *ymeti Muhamet* only to describe the community of Muslim believers.

used for Muslim believers at the time of Prophet Muhammad, during the wars of the second caliph ‘Umar and also for the Muslim contemporaries of the poet:

Për Omerë që është faruk,
që vrej atë që s’bënej *turk*..¹⁶

(For ‘Umar who is just and who noted those who did not want to become Muslims)

Me para i hyn Qabesë
kush ka bë *turqërit* pjesë,
sheh mekamin e Fatimesë...¹⁷

(Whoever is a Muslim goes first to the Ka’aba and visits the place of Fatima)

Kush është *turk* ta këndonjë
këtë Mevlud që u rrëfye...¹⁸

(Whoever is a Turk shall read this Mewlid that was recounted).

Turqitë të zënë besë
ati nurit nybyvetit,
e ndenj nuri < d’ > Eminenë
gjer kondisi Muhametit.¹⁹

(The Muslims should trust that prophetic glamour, a glamour that hovered over Amina until Muhammad appeared)

It appears that the term *Turk* has prevailed over the two other terms *mymin* and *ymeti Muhamet*. This can be inferred from the high frequency of its use but also from the derivative forms of this word and their usage: *turqëri* in the sense of Islam, the religious faith of the Muslims, and *turqeps* (to Turkize) to mark the action/process of spread of Islam in the world.

Turqëri, in the poetry of Hasan Zyko Kamberi, unlike the *Albanian Divan* by Nezim Berati, means only the Islamic religion. In fact, the use of the name of the believer to mark his or her religious faith, as the case was in Albanian with the use of the term *Turk* and its derivative form *Turqëri* (used respectively in the meaning of “Muslim” and “Islam”), is in line with the development of derivative forms of the words *Müslüman* and *Müslümanlık* in the Ottoman Turkish.

Furthermore, the situations where the term *Turqëri* is used are clear in meaning and sound natural. The poet uses this designation to indicate the faith spread by prophet Muhammad, to point out the work done by the founders of

16 Poem *Mynaxhat* (Munacat), lines 181-182.

17 Poem *Paraja* (Para), lines 149-151.

18 Poem *Mevludi* (Mewlid), lines 107-108.

19 Poem *Mevludi*, lines 35-38.

the juridical schools for the consolidation of Islam (Maliki, Shafii, Hanbali), or to assess the contribution of the renown work “*Envar-ül-Aşikin*” in the religious field by author Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bîcân:

Kur mbushi të dyzet vjetë,
zu davan e *turqërisë*,
i xbritë Xhebrili vetë,
i sjell vahn’ e Perëndisë.²⁰

(When he turned forty, he engaged in the matter of Islam; Jibreel descended and brought the word of God)

Për Maliqnë e për Shafiinë,
për Ahmet Hanbelinë,
që shtuanë *turqërinë*²¹

(For Malik and for Shafii, for Ahmad Hanbali, who increased Islam)

I ujdisi Jezidisë,
bë asllan të Perëndisë,
theu hatërë *turqërisë*,²²

(Against the lion of God, he obeyed Yazid, displeasing Islam)

Foli *Envarül aşikin-ë*
qitap që bën *turqërinë*,
kur duall maletë ndrinë,
si Mexhnuni me Lejlanë.²³

(Narrated *Envar-ül-aşikin*, the book that made Islam which, when published, enlightened the mountains, just like Layla and Majnun)

Such linguistic differences noted in the two poets appear also in the denominations they use for the concept of *religion*. The expressions used by Nezim Berati to designation Islam, respectively *dini Islam* (Muslim faith) and *dini Muhamet* (Muhammad’s faith) are not found in Hasan Zyko Kamberi. The term *din* “religion” found in the latter appears grammatically integrated in the Albanian language, but alongside them, we see another expression formed in the Albanian language, *din dhe Iman*, an idiom that retains this form also in the present day Albanian language.²⁴

20 Poem *Mevludi*, lines 81-84.

21 Poem *Mynaxhat*, lines 225-227.

22 Poem *Mavijeja* (Muawiyah), lines 21-23.

23 Poem *Ilahi për Krijuesin* (Hymn to the Creator), lines 37-40.

24 Nukë ka din edhe iman,
sot për sot dë këtë zaman..

(For the moment, at this time there is neither belief nor trust). The poem *Ikrar dhe Tasdik* (Assertion and admission), lines 97-98; and,

Them, unë i ziu i pafat,
të vinj e të të jem ngjat,

Furthermore, unlike Nezim Berati, the poet Hasan Zyko Kamberi does not see the world divided in *turq e kaurrë* (Muslims and Christians),^{25*} but he looks upon the Christians as the “others” within the daily reality where relationships of various natures, particularly financial, existed. Has this concept influenced the semantic meanings and developments of words? The answer to this question is closely linked with the analysis of the cultural developments of the 18th century and with a profound study on the contemporary discourse on such an issue. However, from the studies conducted so far, we may say that both poets, who have written within a time difference of fifty years from one another, manifest differences particularly in their attitudes towards the words that penetrated from Turkish into Albanian language. In the poetry of Hasan Zyko Kamberi, the Turkish composites, formed according to the rules of Arabic and Persian, are used very rarely and the concepts expressed in such composites are denominated using the linguistic means of the Albanian language. In the meantime, the words that have penetrated from the Turkish display a more linguistically integrated form and are written in the phonetic form in which they are used in the Albanian language. This fact constitutes a new phase in the process of integration of Turkish words in the Albanian language. On the other hand, such a situation, in addition to the stabilization and integration of Turkish words in the Albanian language, testifies also to a further elaboration of the poetic Albanian and to some extent of consolidation in this regard.

Furthermore, the manner in which the nouns *Turk* and *Turqëri* are used and besides them also the verb *turqepsi* (to turkize), with a prevailing frequency and with an unequivocal semantic content, testifies to their clear usage and to a stable linguistic situation. This is a fact shown also in the Albanian-Turkish dictionary by *Hafiz Ali Ulqinaku*, written in 1897, in which the Albanian nouns *Turk* and *Turqëni* (the variant of *Turqëri* in Geg dialect of Albanian) have the corresponding terms in the Ottoman Turkish *müslüman* and *müslümanlık*, respectively.²⁶

ja më vra, ja më bën azat,
ashtu paç din' e imanë!

(Say I, the wretched and the unfortunate, let me come near, kill me or let me go, may you have belief and trust!) Poem *Ty bota zili të kanëë* (*The whole world envies you*), lines 13-16.

- 25 During the nationalistic period, and in particular in the last decade of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, assumed a certain ideological content reflecting the religious division. For this reason, the study of the way in which this group of words was used in Albanian is of special interest, especially in order to understand the ideological experiences that Albanians have gone through. Discourse analysis, methodologically, is one of the ways that leads to the accurate perception of the ideological environment prevailing in the Albanian territories at this particular time period.
- 26 Osman Myderrizi, “Fjalori shqip-turqisht i Hafiz Ali Ulqinakut (Albanian-Turkish Dictionary of Hafiz Ali Ulqinaku),” *Studime Filologjike* 3 (1965): 168.

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Linguistic organization and usages in the designation and conveyance of concepts testify to our direct historical experiences. Furthermore “a concept binds a variety of historical experience and a collection of theoretical and practical references into a relation that is, as such, only given and actually ascertainable through the concept.”²⁷ In this context, the use in the 18th century Albanian of the words *Turk* and *Turqëri* to denote the Muslim believers and the religious faith of the Muslims, Islam, is closely linked with the experience of Albanians with this faith and directly with the phenomenon of their first contacts with this religion and the form in which it was institutionalized, beginning from the second half of the 14th century. It is a well known historical fact that this process of institutionalization began to be implemented with the arrival of the Ottoman armies at Albanian territories and the ever more intensive contacts of Albanians with the Ottoman state and with the Ottoman Turks, in particular.

Meanwhile, the use of the term *Turk* within the meaning of the Muslim believer is a linguistic reality that, in addition to the poets Nezim Berati and Hasan Zyko Kamberi, we find also in the other Albanian Muslim poets of the 18th century (e.g., Muhamet Çami²⁸ and Tahir Efendi Boshnjaku).²⁹ This reality, but also the fact that we find it reflected also in the *Albanian-Turkish Dictionary* of Hafiz Ali Ulqinaku (1897) go to show its clear perception and consolidated linguistic state, as well as its broad knowledge and usage in the Albanian territories.

O pojmu “Turčin” u albanskoj literaturi 18. vijeka

Sažetak:

U albanskoj literaturi 18-og vijeka, termin *Turčin* (albanski Turčin) i turska pripadnost (albanski Turqëri) imali su specifičnu upotrebu koja je direktno povezana sa odnosima koje su Albanci uspostavili sa Otomanskim carstvom i Islamom kao vjerskom okosnicom političke formacije države. U svom albanskom Divanu napisanom u prvoj deceniji 18-og vijeka, Nezim Berati vidi svijet podijeljen na Turke (muslimane) i Kaurrë (kršćane). U ovoj religijskoj percepciji svijeta, on označava zajednicu muslimanskih vjernika

27 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London 1985, p. 84.

28 Osman Myderrizi, “Erveheja,” *Buletin për Shkencat Shoqërore*, 1 (1957): 253-278.

29 Idriz Ajeti, “Pamje historike e ligjërimit shqip të Gjakovës në fillim të shekullit XIX (An historical overview of Albanian discourse at the beginning of the 19th century), vol. II, Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, 1998, p. 45-59.

kao Turqëri, što je albanska kovanica sastavljene od imena Turčin sa sufiksom –ri koji se u tom jeziku uobičajeno koristi za označavanje zbirne imenice.

Pjesnik Hasan Zyko Kamberi (18. vijek) takođe koristi termin Turčin za označavanje svih muslimanskih vjernika, bez distinkcije u vremenu i prostoru. Turčin je termin koji se koristi za muslimanske vjernike u vrijeme Poslanika Muhameda iz doba ratova drugog halife Omera, ali i za muslimanske savremenike ovog pjesnika.

Upotreba termina Turčin i Turqëri za obilježavanje muslimanskih vjernika i vjeroispovijesti muslimana- Islama- usko je povezana sa iskustvom Albanaca sa ovom vjerom i direktno sa fenomenom njihovih prvih kontakata sa ovom religijom, kao i načinom na koji je ona institucionalizirana, počev od druge polovine 14-og vijeka. Dobro je poznata historijska činjenica da je ovaj proces institucionalizacije počeo da se primjenjuje sa dolaskom Otomanske vojske na albansku teritoriju i sa sve intenzivnijim kontaktima Albanaca sa otomanskom državom i posebno sa Otomanskim Turcima.

Ključne riječi: albanska literatura, Turčin, Islam, identitet, Nezim Berati, Hasan Zyko Kamberi.

